

Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks at the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives' National Conference

June 26, 2008

Thank you very much. Please be seated. Now how beautiful was that; from being a homeless mother of two to introducing the President of the United States. There has to be a higher power. I love being with members of the armies of compassion, foot soldiers in helping make America a more hopeful place. Every day, you mend broken hearts with love. You mend broken lives with hope, and you mend broken communities with countless acts of extraordinary kindness.

Groups like yours have harnessed the power that no government bureaucracy can match. So when I came to Washington, my goal was to ensure that government made you a full partner in our efforts to serve those in need. And the results have been uplifting, and that's what we're here to talk about today. It's an opportunity to celebrate your achievements, to thank you for your life-changing work, and to look ahead to ways that you will extend your record of compassion in the years to come.

I really want to thank Jay Hein and those who worked hard to put on this conference. It looks like it's a successful one from here. I'm honored that members of the administration have come—the Attorney General, Judge Michael Mukasey. Mr. General, thanks for coming. Secretary Ed Schafer, Department of Agriculture; Secretary Carlos Gutierrez, Department of Commerce; Director John Walters, Office of National Drug Control Policy—thank you all for taking time to be here.

Ambassador Mark Dybul, U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator—Mark, thanks for coming; appreciate you being here. I'm going to talk about PEPFAR in a minute. But when I talk about PEPFAR, think about his extraordinary leadership, as I do.

I want to thank the Ambassador from the Republic of Rwanda. Mr. Ambassador, I'm proud you're here. And I want to thank all

of those who've come around the country who work in our Faith-Based and Community Initiative for your leadership and your compassion and your decency.

You know, when I ran for President, like a lot of others around our country, I was troubled to see so many of our citizens' greatest needs going unmet. Too many addicts walked the rough road of recovery alone. Too many prisoners had the desire for reform, but no one showed them a way. Across the country, the hungry and the homeless, the sick and the suffering begged for deliverance, and too many heard only silence.

And the tragedy that was—a lot of good folks in America—a lot of good men and women who had the desire to help, but didn't have the resources—they had the heart, but not the resources. And because many of them worked with small charities, they were overlooked by Washington as potential partners in service. And because many of them belonged to faith-based organizations, they were often barred from receiving support from the Federal Government.

So I set about to change that, at least from the Federal perspective, with an approach called compassionate conservatism. This approach was compassionate because it was rooted in a timeless truth: That we ought to love our neighbors as we'd like to be loved ourselves. And it was conservative because it recognized the limits of government. Bureaucracies can put money in people's hands, but they cannot put hope in a person's heart.

Putting hope in people's hearts is the mission of our Nation's faith-based and community groups. And today we're going to herald some of the results of the collective work of compassionate Americans. To me, it does not matter if there's a crescent on your group's wall, a rabbi on your group's board, or Christ in your group's name. If your organization puts medicine in the people's hands, food in people's mouths, or a roof over people's heads, then you're succeeding. And for the sake of our country, the Government ought to support your work.

I was reviewing my first major policy speech as a candidate for President. It seems like a long time ago—July 22, 1999. Here's what I said. I said: "In every instance where my administration sees a responsibility to

help people, we will look first to faith-based organizations, charities, and community groups that have shown their ability to save and change lives. We will make a determined attack on need by promoting the compassionate acts of others.”

As my—President, my first Executive order was to establish the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives at the White House. And my next one led to the creation of faith-based and community offices at 11 Federal Agencies. These offices were tasked with the—this new mission: to lower the legal and institutional barriers that prevented government and faith-based groups from working as partners and to ensure that the armies of compassion played a central role in our campaign to make America more promising and more just.

We’ve carried out this mission in two ways. First, we have helped level the playing field for faith-based groups and other charities, especially small organizations that have struggled to compete for funds in the past. We’ve educated religious groups about their civil rights. We’ve made the Federal grant application process more accessible and transparent. We’ve trained thousands of Federal employees to ensure that government does not discriminate against faith-based organizations. We’ve ensured that these groups do not have to give up their religious character to receive taxpayer money.

With these steps, we followed a principle rooted both in our Constitution and the best traditions of our Nation. Government should never fund the teaching of faith, but it should support the good works of the faithful.

Second, my administration has advanced policies that yield greater support for faith-based and community groups. In other words, it’s one thing to talk it; it’s another thing to act. So we worked with Congress, and we’ve had a lot of help in the Congress.

By the way, this wasn’t an easy idea for some to swallow in the Congress, and yet we did have good help. We amended the Tax Code to provide greater incentives for charitable donations, and we established what’s called the Compassion Capital Fund to help faith-based and community groups operate more efficiently and secure additional funding from the private sector. This year, we launched what’s called the Pro Bono Chal-

lenge, a 3-year campaign to encourage corporate professionals like accountants and lawyers to share their time and expertise with groups such as yours.

In all these ways, the administration has upheld its promise to treat community and faith-based organizations as trusted partners. We’ve held your organizations to high standard and insisted on clear results. And your organizations have delivered on those results. You’ve helped revolutionize the way government addresses the greatest challenges facing our society. I truly believe the faith-based initiative is one of the most important initiatives of this administration.

I would like to share with you some of your record. Faith-based and community groups have revolutionized the way our government shelters the homeless. Together we’ve worked to reduce the number of Americans who go to sleep each night vulnerable and exposed, unsure of where they’ll sleep tomorrow. For example, the Department of Housing and Urban Development has partnered with faith-based and community groups to find homeless Americans safe places to stay. And according to the most recent data, this program has helped reduce the number of chronically ill homeless by nearly 12 percent, getting more than 20,000 Americans off the street.

Faith-based and community groups have revolutionized the way we help Americans break the chains of addiction. Through our Access to Recovery program, we provide addicts with vouchers that they can redeem at treatment centers of their choice. So far, Access to Recovery has helped approximately 200,000 addicts along the path to clean lives. And many have been inspired to call upon a higher power to help them break the chains of addiction.

One person who’s turned her life around through this program is Ramie Siler. You don’t know Ramie yet, but you’re about to. Ramie was once lost to substance abuse and depression. Even when she tried to get clean for her daughter’s high school graduation, Ramie could not break free from her addiction. And then she found a faith-based group, a group of decent citizens reaching out to people like Ramie. It was called the Next Door.

At the Next Door, Ramie met people who stood by her during the difficult times of recovery. They gave Ramie a second chance to become a productive citizen and a good mother. Today, she's reunited with her daughter, Dawn. She helps other women as a Next Door case manager. And I'd like to tell you what she said, she used the words of Saint Paul: "Old things have passed away; behold, all things are becoming new."

Ramie is with us today with a Vanderbilt sophomore, her daughter, Dawn. Ramie, where are you? Oh, there they are. [*Applause*] So you applaud for Ramie, but you're also applauding for those compassionate souls at the Next Door. Faith-based community is—[*applause*—our faith community is doing a fantastic job of saving lives.

Faith-based and community groups have revolutionized the way our government helps the children of prisoners. It's hard to imagine what it's like for a child to have to enter a prison gate just to get a hug from a mom or a dad. Government can't hug these kids, but it can support caring mentors who do. Through our Mentoring Children of Prisoners program, we've joined with faith-based and community groups to match nearly 90,000 children of prisoners with adults who offer love and guidance and a positive example.

Faith and community groups have revolutionized the way our government gives prisoners across America a second chance. In the past, government frequently ignored groups like yours in its efforts to help former prisoners become productive citizens. Like, it just didn't enter people's minds that the faith-based and community groups could actually help change lives. Yet through the prisoner reentry initiative that we created in 2004, we've enlisted faith-based and community groups to help provide services like job placement and mentoring programs for thousands of former inmates. Really, what we did is help them find love.

And the work has made a huge difference. Nationwide, 44 percent of prisoners are rearrested within a year of their release. Yet among prisoners that have been helped by people, like people in this room, the number is three times lower, just 15 percent.

Faith-based and community groups have helped a lot in America, and they've helped revolutionize the way our government alleviates suffering and disease around the world. I'm about to describe some of our programs. But oftentimes I'm asked, why? Why do you care what happens outside of America? I believe to whom much is given, much is required. And I believe we got plenty of capacity to help people at home and abroad. And I believe it is in the moral interests of the United States to help when it comes to defeating malaria, for example.

Malaria is a disease which kills one African child every 30 seconds. And it is something we can do something about. The U.S. Government launched a 5-year, \$1.2 billion initiative in 2005 to cut the number of malaria-related deaths in 15 African nations by half. With strong support from groups like yours, our malaria initiative is producing results, tangible results. In just over 2 years, it's reached more than 25 million people.

The island of Zanzibar, which is affiliated with Tanzania, the infection rate has gone from 20 percent of babies born to less than 1 percent of babies born in 16 months.

The organizations about which I'm talking today are vital to the Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, known as PEPFAR. We got to give everything initials in Washington. [*Laughter*] We launched this program in 2003—this is a program that Ambassador Dybul runs so effectively. We launched this program in 2003. When we launched it there was about 50,000 people in sub-Saharan Africa that were receiving antiretroviral treatment for HIV/AIDS. As a result of a focused campaign, I'm pleased to announce that today we support treatment for nearly 1.7 million people. Think about that.

And one of the beautiful things about this initiative is that we're saving babies. To date, PEPFAR has allowed nearly 200,000 African babies to be born HIV-free.

These new numbers show the program is a huge success. And it would not have been a—nearly the success it's been without the partners who carry out the work, without the faith-based community that is on the front-line of saving lives, not only here at home but in places like Africa.

You know, it's been amazing to watch this experience. People who report back to Mark and myself talk about what's called the Lazarus effect, where communities were once given up for dead have now found new life and new hope.

I traveled to—you know, we had a fantastic trip to Africa; Laura and I went. And the outpouring of love for the American citizens is great. I mean, this—it is such an honor to represent our country and to see the hard work of the American citizens and the generosity of the American citizens paying off in the smiling faces that line the road.

When we were in Tanzania, we went to visit a clinic where a 9-year-old girl was HIV-positive, and she'd lost both her parents to AIDS. And for the last year, Catholic Relief Services had been helping the girl. And her grandmother said this: "As a Muslim, I never imagined that a Catholic group would help me like that." And she went on to say, "I'm so grateful to the American people."

The United States Senate must follow the lead of the United States House and reauthorize this vital program.

I really am grateful for those who are here and those around the country who serve in the armies of compassion. It didn't require a government law to get you to sign up. You chose to do so out of the goodness of your heart. We've made great strides in fulfilling the goal, and I am confident that the progress that you have made over the last 8 years will continue.

I'm confident because the movement is bigger than politics or any political party. This is not a political convention. This is a compassion convention. This is, "we don't care about politic" convention. We care about saving lives.

You realize that 35 Governors have faith-based offices, 19 of them Democrats, 16 of them Republicans. Seventy mayors of both parties have similar programs at the municipal level.

I'm confident that this initiative has built a powerful grassroots network. We've trained over 100,000 social entrepreneurs. Isn't that amazing? In this brief period of time, 100,000 people have been trained. Last year, we provided more than 19,000 competitive grants to community and faith-based organizations. Why? Because we want to change

America for the better. We want people to be able to be empowered to do their work of love and compassion and bringing dignity to every human life. We've laid the foundation for an effort that will continue transforming lives long after I've been back to Texas.

I am confident about the power of this program because the initiative has tapped into the compassionate spirit of America. Over the past 7 years, more of our fellow citizens have discovered that the pursuit of happiness leads by following the path of service. It's amazing what happens when you love somebody like you like to be loved yourself; your own soul is enriched. More citizens are understanding that by serving, you serve yourself. Americans have volunteered in record numbers. Sixty million people have volunteered in America this year, nearly a third of them through faith-based groups. It's an amazing statistic, isn't it? It really speaks to the great beauty of our country.

I'm confident because I know how easily the compassionate spirit can spread. There's an interesting story that I want to share with you about Ugandan women who help—have been helped by PEPFAR. These were good souls who worked in a mine. They crushed rocks into gravel by hand. And it is tough work, really hard work. Then they heard about Katrina, and somehow they scraped together \$1,000, and they gave it to the U.S. Embassy for the storm's victim. And one woman said with pride: "We are now donors."

And I'm confident above all because I know the character of the men and women gathered in this hall. In your countless quiet acts of grace, you serve the highest ideals of our Nation. These are the ideals that preserve America as the beacon of hope, the great light of freedom.

A few years ago, I met a young guy named Elijah Anyieth. Elijah was a little boy, and his village was bombed during Sudan's civil war. He lost both his parents, and he spent years wandering from one refugee camp to another. Eventually, he resettled in Virginia, thanks to a partnership between a faith-based group and the State Department.

Once Elijah arrived, a local Catholic charity found him a place to call home. He came

to a foreign soil after wandering in refugee camps and he found some love. He enrolled in high school. Just last month, he graduated from college. He's landed his dream job. The boy who grew up without electricity or running water is now a mechanical engineer. Elijah, where are you? There he is, right there. [Applause] You applaud for a good man named Elijah, but also for those kind souls who share in the great story of this good man.

It's only in a place like America—think about it; think about our country for a second—could a life nearly extinguished by hate be restored by love and compassion.

So I've been proud to stand by you as you have worked these miracles across our country. You probably don't even realize some of the acts of kindness are miracles. I'm telling you, they are. And you can find it in the hopeful expressions on the people you've helped. And so I thank you for your efforts. I thank you for your life-changing work. And I thank you for your record of compassion that I'm confident you will build on in the years to come.

May God bless you, and may God continue to bless our country. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:59 p.m. at the Omni Shoreham Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Edith Espinoza, administrative assistant, Chicano Federation of San Diego County, Inc., who introduced the President; Jay F. Hein, director, Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives; and Rwanda's Ambassador to the U.S. James Kimonyo.

Remarks on Congressional Action on the Legislative Agenda

June 26, 2008

Fourth of July is fast approaching, and Democratic leaders in Congress have scheduled another recess. Americans are concerned that Congress may leave town with a lot of important business that hasn't been completed.

Before they leave, the Congress needs to pass an emergency war funding bill so that our troops on the frontlines have the tools they need to protect themselves and us. The House passed a good bill, and now the Senate needs to act.

Before they leave, Congress needs to give our intelligence professionals the tools they need to act quickly and effectively to monitor foreign terrorist communications so we can stop any new attack. The House passed a good—very good bipartisan bill, and the Senate needs to act.

Before they leave, the Senate needs to make progress on the enormous backlog of nominations that they've held up. Many of these nominations are for vital positions affecting our courts, our economy, our public safety, and our national security. Every day that these nominees are delayed makes it harder for the Government to meet its responsibilities, and the Senate needs to act right away.

Now, when they come back—when they get off their recess, the Democratic Congress needs to act on critical issues that they've failed to address. One such issue is housing legislation. The Congress needs to come together and pass responsible housing legislation to help more Americans keep their homes.

Another area of concern for the American citizens is the price of gasoline. And one way to relieve the price of gasoline is to expand domestic production of crude oil here at home. The Congress failed to act on this measure, and they got to when they come back.

And finally, the Congress needs to act when it comes to the Colombia free trade agreement. This is a good deal for our economy. It will help our economy grow, and it's strong—to support our friend and ally in the neighborhood, Colombia.

I'm—I asked the Democratic leaders to make the last 2 days before their recess productive. I will, of course, wish the Members—to have a great Fourth of July week. And I'm looking forward to working with them to address critical issues facing our Nation when they return.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:45 p.m. in the Diplomatic Reception Room at the White House.